



# THE NAVAJO NATION

RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT  
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## President Begaye and Vice President Nez deliver State of the Navajo Nation Address

WINDOW ROCK-Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez recapped accomplishments of their first five months in office when they delivered the State of the Navajo Nation Address at the start of the 2015 Navajo Nation Council Fall Session.

Both leaders thanked Speaker Lorenzo Bates and members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council for allowing them the time to deliver the State of the Navajo Nation address.

"Vice President Jonathan Nez and I are five months into our administration and already we are making significant strides tribally, regionally and nationally," President Begaye said.

Three new cabinet members were introduced. They all will be coming before Council for final confirmation during this 2015 Fall Council Session.

Dr. Donald Benn has been selected for the position of Executive Director for the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency. Dr. Benn earned his doctoral degree in Chemistry from New Mexico State University. Previously, he worked as Director of the Native American Research Laboratory at the University of Montana in Missoula.

Mrs. Biddah Becker has been selected to serve in the capacity of Executive Director for the Division of Natural Resources. Mrs. Becker has served as the Assistant Attorney General for the Navajo Nation Department of Justice leading the Natural Resources Unit. Mrs. Becker earned her Juris Doctorate from the University of New Mexico School of Law.

Mrs. Terrelene G. Massey has been chosen to lead the Division of Social Services as their Executive Director. Mrs. Massey is from Pinon. She graduated from the University of New Mexico School of Law and is a licensed attorney in the State of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation. She earned her master's degree in Public Affairs from the University of Texas at Austin.

One significant milestone of the Begaye-Nez administration thus far has been the Gold King Mine spill, which occurred on August 5, 2015. At the hands of a USEPA contract worker, the spill expelled upwards of 3 million gallons of contaminated water into the Animas River which is a tributary of the San Juan River.

Hundreds of Navajo farmers and ranchers depend on the San Juan River for their crops and livestock. The spill had devastating impacts to the region.

Resulting from the USEPA's self-acknowledged responsibility in the Gold King Mine spill, Administrator Jared Blumenfeld visited the Navajo Nation last week to discuss remediation of the river. Discussion



President Russell Begaye (right) and Vice President Jonathan Nez presented the State of the Navajo Nation address yesterday at the start of the 2015 Navajo Nation Council Fall Session.

topics included a 5-year plan to address the cleanup of abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation, the Clean Air Act, and a preliminary long-range plan for the clean-up of the Gold King Mine spill.

A cooperative agreement is also in the process of being developed to reimburse the Navajo Nation for associated response costs.

"Relations between the USEPA and the Navajo Nation remain cordial and we are both very interested in reaching an agreement that benefits the Navajo Nation and our Navajo people," said President Begaye.

Vice President Nez said that one of the most pressing issues facing the Nation is youth suicide, which has reached epidemic proportions within the Navajo Nation.

"The number of suicides since August 2015 has increased to eight within the Navajo Nation," he said.

In response, the Navajo Nation Division of Health is working to build an interdisciplinary team to address this epidemic. The Vice President said he urged Sylvia Burwell, US Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, to bring the issue to the White House Council on Native American Affairs so that all necessary departments are involved in bringing an end to native youth suicide.

Navajo veterans remain a top priority as one of the four pillars of the administration. As such, all divisions under the Executive Branch have been directed to include Navajo veterans in their division strategy, whether for employment, training or other forms of assistance.

"Our Navajo veterans have served as protectors of the United



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States and the Navajo Nation. It's our duty to honor their service," President Begaye said. "Our administration has met with members of Congress and the Senate to discuss veteran issues, which include housing, employment, health care and mental health counseling services for post-traumatic stress disorder."

President Begaye also discussed a recent visit to residents of the Former Bennett Freeze Area in which members of his cabinet addressed concerns of housing, infrastructure and roads. The area has been without development for nearly fifty years as a result of the Navajo-Hopi land dispute.

"A Promise Zone application highlighting this development project will be created and submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture for consideration for the one award designated for a tribe," he said. "A Promise Zone award will help increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, leverage private investment and

enhance public health."

Other highlights included: the Navajo Nation assuming control of three San Juan County fire stations along with associated assets; the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project in which Congress has passed technical amendments that will facilitate a process for the Nation and the Federal Government to deliver water from the project; and the Ramah Chapter winning a 25-year long legal dispute with the United States government which resulted in a \$58 million victory for the Navajo Nation.

In conclusion, President Begaye told the Council, "This is just a broad overview of the efforts we have worked diligently to put forth. In order for these goals and objectives to be achieved, we must commit to working together."

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